

## *A Question of Order*

A sutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya—SN 48:40—presents two puzzles. The first and more important of the two is that it makes claims about the third and fourth jhāna that are clearly inconsistent with the standard description of those jhānas found at many points throughout the suttas. The second is that it makes a claim about the first jhāna that appears to contradict another passage in the suttas, found in AN 5:176.

The second puzzle is hard to resolve, in that the standard description of the jhānas doesn't clearly adjudicate as to whether SN 48:40 is more or less correct than AN 5:176 on the point on which they differ.

As for the first puzzle, we have to take the standard description of the jhānas as more authoritative than SN 48:40, as that description deals with matters that the Buddha cited as among the most important of his teachings and is repeated so many places in the Canon. This would be grounds for rejecting SN 48:40, as we currently have it, as being genuine Dhamma, using as our guide the Buddha's own standards for deciding what is and isn't genuine Dhamma, as found in DN 16.

The title of SN 48:40, though, suggests a way in which the inconsistency at the heart of the first puzzle could be resolved.

But first, some background.

SN 48, the saṃyutta in which SN 48:40 appears, is devoted to *indriyas*, or faculties. It begins by focusing on the five faculties listed in the *bodhipakkhiya-dhammas*, or wings to awakening: the faculties of conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment. Beginning with SN 48:22, however, the saṃyutta begins to treat other lists of faculties as well. SN 48:31 to 48:40 deal with a list of five feeling faculties: the faculty of pleasure (*sukha*), the faculty of pain (*dukkha*), the faculty of happiness (*somanassa*), the faculty of distress (*domanassa*), and the faculty of equanimity (*upekkhā*). These faculties are defined as follows: *sukha* refers to physical pleasure, *dukkha* to physical pain, *somanassa* to mental pleasure, *domanassa* to mental pain, and equanimity to a feeling of neither comfort nor discomfort that could be either physical or mental.

SN 48:40 states that a monk should understand each of these faculties, its origin, its cessation, and where it ceases without remainder. In the course of its discussion, it states that the faculty of *dukkha* ceases without remainder when one enters the first jhāna; the faculty of *domanassa*, when one enters the second jhāna; the faculty of *sukha* when one enters the third jhāna; the faculty of *somanassa* when one enters the fourth jhāna; and the faculty of equanimity, when one enters the cessation of perception and feeling.

It's in its description of where the faculties of sukha and somanassa cease—respectively in the third and fourth jhānas—that the sutta is at odds with the standard description of the jhānas.

Here's that description:

“With the fading of rapture, one remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses sukha with the body. One enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a sukha abiding.’ ...

“With the abandoning of sukha & dukkha—as with the earlier disappearance of somanassa & domanassa—one enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither sukha nor dukkha.” — *DN 2*

The contradictions are obvious. The standard description of the third jhāna mentions twice that it is characterized as sukha, whereas SN 48:40 states that sukha ceases without remainder in the third jhāna. The standard description of the fourth jhāna states that somanassa and domanassa disappeared before one enters the fourth jhāna, whereas SN 48:40 states that somanassa ceases only on entering the fourth jhāna.

Here it's important to recall the Buddha's standards for deciding what is and is not genuine Dhamma. He sets forth four standards in DN 16, with minor variations among the four, each stating the principle that when someone claims to be reporting what is “Dhamma, Vinaya, the Teacher's instruction,” his claim is to be judged, not by the authority of the person or people he cites as the source of the claim, but by whether the report is consistent with what one knows to be the suttas and Vinaya as you know it. Here's an example:

“Then there is the case where a monk says this: ‘In a monastery over there dwell many learned elder monks who know the tradition, who have memorized the Dhamma, the Vinaya, and the Mātikā. Face-to-face with those elders I have heard this, face-to-face have I received this: This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Teacher's instruction.’ His statement is neither to be approved nor scorned. Without approval or scorn, take careful note of his words and make them stand against the suttas and tally them against the Vinaya. If, on making them stand against the suttas and tallying them against the Vinaya, you find that they don't stand with the suttas or tally with the Vinaya, you may conclude: ‘This is not the word of the Blessed One; this monk has misunderstood it’—and you should reject it. But if, on making them stand against the suttas and tallying them against the Vinaya, you find that they stand with the suttas and tally with the Vinaya, you may conclude: ‘This is the word of the Blessed One; this monk has understood it rightly.’” — *DN 16*

This statement was set forth before the suttas as we know them were collected, so the simple fact that a sutta has been included in the Sutta Piṭaka does not mean that it has to be accepted as genuine Dhamma, especially if it conflicts with sutta passages that carry more authority. On these grounds alone, it's enough to note that, because SN 48:40's description of where the faculties of sukha and somanassa cease without remainder is inconsistent with the standard descriptions of the jhānas, what SN 48:40 has to say on this point can be rejected as not genuine Dhamma.

However, as I stated above, the title of the sutta suggests a way in which this issue could be resolved. It's called *Uppaṭṭika* or *Uppaṭṭipāṭika*, which means Irregular Order. The question is, is the organization of the sutta really irregular? On the one hand, the five feeling faculties are not listed in the same order as they are in SN 48:31–39. In those suttas, the list is: sukha, dukkha, somanassa, domanassa, and upekkhā. In SN 48:40, the list is: dukkha, domanassa, sukha, somanassa, and upekkhā. So in that sense, the order in SN 48:40 is irregular. On the other hand, there is still a certain regularity to the list of feeling faculties here: negative physical, negative mental, positive physical, positive mental, neutral.

As for the jhānas, they're listed in a totally regular order: first, second, third, fourth, and then skipping to the cessation of perception and feeling.

However, if we introduced a little more irregularity into the sutta, it would actually resolve the inconsistency between SN 48:40 and the standard description of the jhānas, at the same time making the title of the sutta even more appropriate.

The way to do it would be this: (1) Instead of saying that sukha ends with the third jhāna, we could say that it ends with the fourth. That would fit with the description of the third jhāna, which mentions sukha in that jhāna twice. (2) Instead of saying that somanassa ends with the fourth jhāna, we could say that it ends with the third: where one is equanimous (apparently in mind) but experiences sukha with the body. That would then fit with the statement in the standard description of the fourth jhāna that both domanassa and somanassa had already ended earlier.

Transposing things in this way would introduce more irregularity into one of the two lists: of feeling faculties or of jhānas.

If we kept the order of the feeling faculties as it is, that would require ordering the four jhānas as: first, second, fourth, and third. If we kept the order of the jhānas as it is, the order of the feeling faculties would become even more irregular: negative physical, negative mental, positive mental, positive physical, neutral.

Perhaps the original sutta was ordered in either of these two more irregular ways, and at some point in time—after the sutta had been

given a title, but before the commentary to the sutta was composed—someone changed the order to make it seem a little more proper.

This proposal is purely conjectural, but it has the advantage of organizing the sutta in such a way that it would salvage this part of the sutta, allowing it to “stand” with the rest of the Sutta Piṭaka.

As for the second puzzle: AN 5:176 makes the following claim about five things that are impossible when one enters in rapture and seclusion—which is apparently a coded reference to the first jhāna:

“Lord, when a disciple of the noble ones enters & remains in seclusion & rapture, there are five possibilities that do not exist at that time: The dukkha & domanassa dependent on sensuality do not exist at that time. The sukha & somanassa dependent on sensuality do not exist at that time. The dukkha & domanassa dependent on what is unskillful do not exist at that time. The sukha & somanassa dependent on what is unskillful do not exist at that time. The dukkha & domanassa dependent on what is skillful do not exist at that time. When a disciple of the noble ones enters & remains in seclusion & rapture, these five possibilities do not exist at that time.”

If this is a coded reference to the first jhāna, it would appear to leave no room for domanassa of any kind to exist in the first jhāna. Alternatively, if it’s actually referring to a form of concentration milder than the first jhāna, it would be stating that this milder form of concentration has no room for domanassa even before entering the first jhāna. Either way, this passage contradicts SN 48:40, which does allow for domanassa to exist in the first jhāna.

However, because the standard description of the jhānas makes no mention of where in the practice of jhāna domanassa ends, there are no objective textual grounds for privileging one of these two suttas over the other. This would be an issue that could be resolved only through actual practice.